

Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board Annual Session 2026

“Joint informal briefing with the Executive Board and Commission on the Status of Women”

Summary

Pursuant to Executive Board decision 2026/6, UN-Women convened a joint informal briefing between the Executive Board of UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on 14 May 2026 to facilitate an exchange of views regarding the implications of potential UN80 structural reform proposals for UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women. The discussion focused primarily on the preservation of the role and integrity of the CSW, within UN-Women and in the UN System, in the context of a potential merger of UN-Women and UNFPA. Member States raised questions regarding mandate preservation, procedural safeguards, governance arrangements, the timeline for presenting alternatives to the merger proposal, and the relationship between Executive Board-level discussions and the broader General Assembly-led UN80 reform process.

I. Introduction

On 14 May 2026, UN-Women convened a joint informal briefing between the Executive Board of UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women, held virtually via Zoom. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Godfrey Kwoba, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations, on behalf of the President of the Executive Board of UN-Women. The podium included H.E. Ms. Alejandra Hernandez, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations, speaking on behalf of the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women; Mr. Mohammed Naciri, Chief of Staff of UN-Women; Catarina Carvalho, Chief of the Intergovernmental Support Section and Mr. Jean-Luc Bories, Secretary of the Executive Board of UN-Women. The briefing was convened pursuant to Executive Board decision 2026/6, which requested an informal briefing between members and observers of the Executive Board of UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women to consider the implications of any UN80 structural reform proposals for UN-Women as it relates to the Commission.

II. Opening Remarks

Opening the meeting, the Chair welcomed participants and introduced the podium. In remarks delivered on behalf of the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, the importance of continued dialogue between Member States and UN-Women regarding ongoing reform discussions were emphasized. Reference was made to the central normative role of the Commission on the Status of Women within the multilateral system, including its agreed conclusions and other outcomes, review of progress on existing commitments, and the facilitation of dialogue among Member States, civil society organizations, United Nations entities and other stakeholders.

The importance of the technical, substantive, and operational support provided by UN-Women to the Commission on the Status of Women in its role as substantive secretariat was also highlighted. In this regard, emphasis was placed on preserving the institutional capacity necessary to ensure the effectiveness, continuity, and ability of the Commission to fulfil its mandate, as well as the integrity of the Commission’s work.

Remarks also underscored the importance of maintaining dedicated spaces for gender equality within the multilateral system, particularly in light of ongoing political and financial pressures affecting multilateral cooperation and women’s rights globally. The Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women reaffirmed the importance of transparency, inclusivity, and intergovernmental consultation throughout any future reform

discussions, and affirmed continued commitment to dialogue and engagement with Member States and UN-Women regarding any future reform proposals.

III. Remarks by UN-Women

The UN-Women Chief of Staff delivered remarks regarding ongoing discussions surrounding UN80 reform proposals and the possible merger of UN-Women and UNFPA. He emphasized that the purpose of the briefing was to facilitate an open exchange with Member States and to hear concerns and observations regarding the implications of potential reform scenarios. He highlighted the importance of preserving UN-Women's triple mandate, including its normative, coordination, and operational functions, noting that these functions are mutually reinforcing.

It was further emphasized that UN-Women's operational presence informs and strengthens its normative work, while normative frameworks simultaneously guide programming and implementation at the country level. He noted that the independent assessment had identified both opportunities and risks associated with a potential merger, and that the assessment supported the view that a potential merger presented significant merit and opportunities for the gender equality agenda. He further stated that UN-Women was preparing alternatives to the merger proposal for presentation to the Executive Boards, pursuant to requests made during the First Regular Session 2026.

He characterized the ongoing reform process as a significant opportunity to strengthen the United Nations gender equality architecture and reiterated that gender equality should remain central across the United Nations system throughout any reform process. In this regard, it was affirmed that any future reform discussions should ensure that gender equality is strengthened, rather than weakened, across the United Nations system.

IV. Discussion

During the interactive dialogue, Member States exchanged views regarding the implications of potential UN80 structural reform proposals for UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women, with several delegations emphasizing the importance of preserving UN-Women's triple mandate, including its normative and coordination functions, in order to protect the integrity and effectiveness of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Multiple delegations stressed the importance of ensuring meaningful consultation with Member States throughout any reform process and highlighted the need for additional clarity regarding the implications of possible structural changes to UN-Women for the Commission on the Status of Women. Delegations underscored the importance of comprehensively assessing all reform options and ensuring that the mandates of existing entities are preserved throughout any future reform process. In this context, it was noted that Member States need to carefully evaluate the information provided before determining next steps.

Questions were raised regarding the broader implications of a potential merger for the functioning of the Commission on the Status of Women and the institutional safeguards that would be required to preserve its role. Several delegations expressed concern regarding the reopening of mandates within an intergovernmental process and highlighted the political risks associated with renegotiating existing normative frameworks.

Concerns were additionally raised regarding the timeline for presenting alternatives to the merger proposal, the respective roles of the Executive Boards in reviewing such alternatives, and the relationship between Board-level discussions and the broader General Assembly-led reform process. Some delegations emphasized that the Commission on the Status of Women remains a Member State-led intergovernmental body and stressed the importance of preserving the Commission's institutional autonomy and normative role. Several delegations highlighted the importance of maintaining UN-Women's role as substantive secretariat to the Commission on the Status of Women and requested further clarification regarding how mandate preservation could be safeguarded procedurally under any future reform scenario.

Delegations expressed concern regarding the absence of guarantees that UN-Women’s mandate would remain fully protected in the event of a merger and called for additional analysis of alternatives to the merger proposal. In this regard, it was requested that alternatives to the merger proposal be made available to delegations in writing and that further clarification be provided regarding the assessment process, the criteria applied, and the risks identified with respect to mandate preservation.

Financial considerations related to the creation of a potential new entity were raised, alongside concerns regarding governance arrangements, visibility, technical specialization, and institutional continuity. Reference was also made to findings within the assessment report indicating that functional overlaps between UN-Women and UNFPA were relatively limited and that complementarities, rather than duplication, characterized much of the entities’ work. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of preserving gender mainstreaming and system-wide coordination functions, with delegations requesting further clarification regarding how these responsibilities would continue to be implemented and institutionally safeguarded.

V. Responses from UN-Women

UN-Women clarified that discussions thus far had focused primarily on the mandates of the entities themselves rather than on the normative frameworks they implement, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). It was emphasized that these normative frameworks were not under consideration for reopening as part of any reform process.

It was further noted that no detailed structural model for a possible merged entity had yet been developed, though preliminary discussions had included possible structures comprising distinct pillars for normative and coordination work, operational functions, and management functions. UN-Women underscored that any such configuration would need to preserve the integrity and effectiveness of support to intergovernmental processes, including to the Commission on the Status of Women. It was noted that preserving normative work and support to intergovernmental processes would remain essential within any future configuration.

Regarding alternatives to the merger proposal, it was explained that such options would first be presented to the Executive Boards of both entities, after which Board leadership would determine whether recommendations should be elevated to the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General, and the broader UN80 reform process.

VI. Conclusion

In concluding remarks, the centrality of UN-Women’s triple mandate was emphasized and that discussions surrounding United Nations reform should strengthen, certainly not weaken, gender equality across the United Nations system.

The Gender Equality Acceleration Plan remained housed within UN-Women and the organization’s continued engagement with other United Nations entities to advance system-wide gender equality objectives was outlined.

In closing, the Chair thanked participants for their engagement and noted that the comments, observations, and questions raised during the discussion had been duly noted.

The meeting was subsequently adjourned.